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In their isolated country house, a mother and her two children prepare to wait out a blinding snowstorm. Two violent predators walk through the door. Nothing will ever be the same.

When the two strangers turn up at Rowena Cooper's isolated Colorado farmhouse, she knows instantly that it's the end of everything. For the two haunted and driven men, on the other hand, it's just another stop on a long and bloody journey. And they still have many miles to go, and victims to sacrifice, before their work is done.

For San Francisco homicide detective Valerie Hart, their trail of victims-women abducted, tortured and left with a seemingly random series of objects inside them-has brought her from obsession to the edge of physical and psychological destruction. And she's losing hope of making a breakthrough before that happens. But the murders at the Cooper farmhouse didn't quite go according to plan. There was a survivor, Rowena's ten-year-old daughter Nell, who now holds the key to the killings. Injured, half-frozen, terrified, Nell has only one place to go. And that place could be even more dangerous than what she's running from.

In this extraordinary, pulse-pounding debut, Saul Black takes us deep into the mind of a psychopath, and into the troubled heart of the woman determined to stop him.

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Most helpful customer reviews

22 of 23 people found the following review helpful.The Killing LessonsBy S Riaz"The world was full of women not noticing the men who were noticing them."

Sometimes you just want to read a really fast paced thriller, full of suspense and edge of your seat excitement and this ticks every box. It begins with Rowena Cooper, a widowed mother of two children, who curses her stupidity in feeling safe in her remote house, when two men walk – rather than break – in. and her nightmare begins...

The two men have been murdering women throughout the country and homicide detective, Valerie Hart, is the officer in charge of an investigation which goes back over three years and has haunted her for the past seven months. Now she is working with Special Agent Carla York, but Valerie cannot help feel that Carla is not completely on her side. Drinking too much and depressed by a love affair which fell apart some time ago, Valerie is an intelligent and driven officer. However, her team are just fishing in the dark and nothing seems to result in any leads. Poring over evidence night after night, Valerie knows that a break can only come with more victims and the past victims are always there, haunting her thoughts.

What follows involves a serial killer haunted by his own demons, a woman held prisoner, a detective who is under attack and a child who knows who the killer looks like. This novel keeps up the pace all the way through, with fascinating, flawed characters, unlikely heroes and some extremely creepy scenes. I really hope that this book has a sequel, as I will surely be reading on if it has. Highly recommended for anyone who enjoys intelligent, well written thrillers. Lastly, I received a copy of this book from the publishers, via NetGalley, for review.

45 of 52 people found the following review helpful.

The same morbid fascination as a multi-car wreck

By Trudie Barreras

Well, it was my own fault that I ended up enmeshed in this book. I didn't HAVE to choose to read it, although it was one of the few viable options on my Vine "queue" at that point. Once I started, of course, it held the same morbid fascination as a multi-car wreck on the highway.

It's too bad there isn't a dual rating system available, like they use for various sports competitions – one set of points for technical quality and one for enjoyment of the presentation. Saul Black's "The Killing Lessons" is pure horror from start to finish, and there is way too much "collateral damage" – but simultaneously, there

is exquisite description and deeply appealing characterization. Of course I know that the gruesome happens, and that normally sensitive human beings in law enforcement fields have to deal with the unthinkable and indescribable, and in the process become victims of PTSD. It's just that in general I've chosen to avoid the grimmest of the "thriller" type of narrative where all this is played out in gory detail.

Anyway, this book is not for the faint of heart; but it IS masterfully articulated and vividly plotted. I have been told that at times a "critical" review, if honest, can help other readers to evaluate a story realistically; this is my best effort at such a review.

14 of 15 people found the following review helpful.

Dark, explicit

By Lynn Benson

One thing I THOROUGHLY enjoyed about the writer's style was the ability to hear the characters voice, to get inside their heads. He captured the humanness of them all. A lead character kept dwelling on a past relationship. Thoughts to herself, comments. And the killers, boy, with all the repetition of thoughts and actions - the reader was able to really look inside of the characters. We're human -- you know when something bothers us, we think on it over and over and can't get something out of our heads? It wasn't conveyed in those types of words, it was conveyed in paragraphs over and over throughout the book. Exactly like you and I would do. Carry on, but still dwelling. It was an interesting way to write, and I wish more authors could manage it without making a book be 1000 pages.

Biggest downside of this book? Not a single main character was likable until the end of the book. Sure, things about them were likable, but overall he painted dark pictures of everyone. Showed us their (insert negative word here) sides.

I'm not necessarily a serial killer story reader, but I like cop books without so much gore. Some of it was shocking, very disturbing. Go into this book knowing it will be a hard read if you have any delicate sensibilities. I found myself grazing past a paragraph here or there, to be honest. I don't need explicit to get the idea. Personal preference for me only.

As far as pace -- it depends on who you're reading about. There are a lot of stories going on at one time in this book, and it's kind of maddening to read about one story and then to have to get through other chapters before returning to the characters/story that excites you the most!

Not a lot of happy in this book.

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